

# When art meets mental health, it changes lives

Read the inspiring stories of brave Australians using art to raise awareness of mental health and wellbeing.

Robyn Ironside



The Courier-Mail and Anglicare have teamed up to bring you the inspiring and life-changing project, Arts&Minds.

**C**rippled by alcoholism since the age of 12, Marie Robertson has seen some dark days. But today she is a pillar of strength – sober, passionate and totally inspiring.

She was selected to be part of Anglicare’s Arts&Minds project for 2018 which pairs five talented unknown artists with five renowned Australian artists. The pairs work together over the course of a day to create meaningful artworks around the theme of clarity, and to share in emotional conversations. The experiences are documented and become part of Anglicare’s web series about mental health and wellbeing.

Only five people are chosen from across the country to be paired with an artist and Marie was one of them.



Marie Robertson is a relative newcomer to painting although it’s something she always wanted to do. Constrained by the disease of alcoholism, nine years ago Marie confronted her demons and won. And when she read about Anglicare’s Arts&Minds program in a Facebook post she knew it was something she had to try. Of the 400 applications received for the program – that pairs an up-and-comer with a professional artist - Marie’s was among just five that were chosen. This is Marie’s story:

"I wanted to go to art school when I left school but what actually happened was I picked up a drink at 13 and drank for the next 25 years. I didn’t paint or draw anything.

"For me, alcohol was my best friend - it was all I needed. It took away all my fears and anxieties, and gave me confidence. It was like the Holy Grail and I chased that for as long as I could.



Marie Robertson knows all too well the pain and suffering mental illness like alcoholism can bring and is proud to be a part of the Arts&Minds project.

"I had my last drink on Australia Day, 2009, and it had stopped working. I wasn’t getting the high out of it or going into oblivion or anything. I was just stuck with this awful fear and panic and loneliness. I decided then if this isn’t going to work I’ll take my own life.

"I decided to hang myself in a park so the kids wouldn’t find me and then the next thing I heard this really loud voice behind and above me and it said, 'Marie, you’re going to die soon'. My next thought was, 'if I’m going to die, I want to die sober' and then I thought 'I haven’t been sober since I was 12'. The next thing I

"I walked in there and I was warmly welcomed. People took my number and they kept calling me. They told me to go to another meeting the next day and I went. I was like a robot. I had nothing left and I got a sponsor and she took me through the steps and I've been taught to sponsor others.

"From that day on I haven't had a drink and that was nine years ago.

*Painting is very emotional, especially for me. It's all about feelings and you go to a place of complete quiet where there're no thoughts at all and I think that's where something is created.*

Marie Robertson

"It was all because of the program I had the courage to pick up a paintbrush and two years later I had a solo (exhibition) in an art gallery. It's amazing what can happen if you're passionate about something.

"Tracey's story was inspiring. She hasn't had an art lesson either and she's also had her own problems.

"Painting is very emotional, especially for me. It's all about feelings and you go to a place of complete quiet where there're no thoughts at all and I think that's where something is created.

"For the theme of the project, I thought you have to go through the calamity to get to the clarity so that's what I painted - the racing mind that lives in my head. I painted on the outside of my head and then the face that I painted was me on the outside. The whole journey is about making mistakes, and mistakes are a good thing in that our weaknesses are some of the best things about us."

TRACEY KELLER

**Tracey Keller is perhaps better known as the pet painter, for her striking artworks of animals. But she is also a tireless worker for charity and when Anglicare asked if she would be willing to give up her time – and talent – for the Arts&Minds project, she did not hesitate. Tracey teamed up with Marie Robertson and over eight hours the women shared much about themselves – in the process creating something truly amazing. This is Tracey's story:**





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Artist Tracey Keller is thrilled to use her art as a way to help those who have struggled with mental health issues.

"I am really passionate about the concept of art and healing. The intention with my paintings is to create joy and I see that first-hand when people come into my Noosa gallery. I see how it can be so uplifting, so when I was actually asked to support a fellow creative who has been touched with mental health issues, I jumped at the opportunity.

"I believe if more people focused on the creative process, the world would be a happier and more peaceful place so the whole concept of what Arts&Minds does, really, really appeal to me.

"I've been a full-time artist for over 17 years now. I had a high-end corporate management career prior to that and I decided to become a professional artist, and from day dot I just wanted to create a positive impact in the world and to create more joy. I grew up on a farm and have always been around animals so it was just a natural progression for me to use the animals in my compositions.

"Artwork can be personal if one chooses for it to be personal. That's actually what I really enjoyed about working with Marie in the Arts&Minds process. She's one incredibly brave person and a kindred spirit because she loves colour, she loves painting.

"Marie was initially very nervous and my job was to help her through that and mentor her. We talked through an entire day. We both had frustrations when we were painting and we both supported each other through it.

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**Tracey Keller**





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eyes. I was pretty proud of what I achieved.



Artist Tracey Keller paired up with aspiring artist Marie Robertson as part of the Anglicare Arts&Minds project.

"Throughout the process I learned a lot about Marie and also myself. Hearing about Marie's life and her acceptance of some of the issues she had and how she's gone about dealing with that – she sought help and had a mentor and now she's actually saving people's lives as well.

"That's pretty crazy. All I do is push paint around."

**To watch Marie and Tracey's webisode and see the rest of the pairs, go to [artsandminds.org.au](https://artsandminds.org.au)**

**The artworks created by Tracey and Marie, and the other four pairs, will be auctioned off at a gala on May 31 with all money raised going to Anglicare Southern Queensland.**

**If you or anyone you know needs help right now, call:**

Lifeline on [13 11 14](https://lifeline.org.au)

Kids Helpline on [1800 551 800](https://kids.helpline.org.au)

MensLine Australia on [1300 789 978](https://mensline.org.au)

Suicide Call Back Service on [1300 659 467](https://scbs.org.au)

Beyond Blue on [1300 22 46 36](https://beyondblue.org.au)

Headspace on [1800 650 890](https://headspace.org.au)

Find out more about Anglicare's [Arts&Minds](https://artsandminds.org.au) project.

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